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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

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(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HOW CONSUMERS BUDGET THEIR FOOD MONEY." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, in the Department of Agriculture.

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Today we're going to get a hint of the answer to some questions that intelligent consumers have been asking for a long time. Such questions as "How much money must people have in order to give their children the right kind of food for their health? How much better food do people buy when they have better incomes? What proportion of the people in the country are getting the right food to eat?" And so on.

We're going to quote Dr. Hazel K. Stiebeling, economist in the Bureau of Home Economics, who has been gathering such information. She reminds us in advance, that what she has to tell us is only a suggestion of what may be the results of a comprehensive new survey now being made. Until then, everything she can tell us must be accepted as tentative. It is based on some previous small studies of non-farm family's diets made between 1913 and 1933 by several agencies both in the Government and out. These were brought together and compared in the Bureau of Home Economics. From them the Bureau summarized the actual amounts of different foods that families bought. Some families had little money to spend for food, Miss Stiebling says, and some had larger amounts. But none of the families studied had incomes in the higher brackets.

Since prices are different in different years, the Bureau figured how much the food bought by families at each of the different periods would have cost if it had been bought between October and December 1934.

"Then," says Dr. Stiebling, "we classified the quantities of food each family bought, according to the level of food expenditure per person in the family. From these figures, we have made rough estimates of the customary consumption habits of families spending at 1934 price levels different specified amounts for food.

"The results showed that among the families studied, the people with more money to spend for food buy more of all types of food, but that certain foods come in for bigger increases than others. For instance, the lowest group -- spending \$30 to \$60 a year for food per person -- apparently bought 125 pints of milk a year per person. The next higher group spending from \$60 to \$90 a year per person for food bought almost twice as much -- 230 pints. The biggest difference in milk consumption was between these two lowest groups, but at the top of the scale in this survey the people who spent \$240 to \$270 a year per person for food, bought 400 pints of milk a year per person, as against 125 pints apiece in the families spending between \$30 and \$60 a year per person for all food.



"Some groups of foods increased even more, between the lowest and the highest spending families. Of the food classified as 'green, leafy, and yellow vegetables,' the families at the top of the income scale bought seven times as much as the lowest group.

"As a whole the survey shows that as buying power went up the families surveyed made the biggest increase in their expenditures for the succulent fruits and vegetables -- that is, the ones other than potatoes and dried legumes. Next highest increases went for eggs and butter, and the next for milk and meat.

"Since these foods are the kind that the nutritionists have found we need to eat for protection, it looks as though people did take advantage of improved income to give their families improved nutrition.

"We have calculated the values of these lists of foods with respect to certain important nutrients and compared them with estimates of amounts needed to give a so-called 'adequate' diet. Here's what we find: On the basis of the way people apparently have been buying and of the prices which they had to pay in 1934, families in the two lowest groups -- the ones spending between \$30 and \$90 a year per person on food, did not -- on the average -- succeed in getting a diet adequate for really good health. Families in the third group -- spending from \$90 to \$120 a year per person on food -- were probably about on the borderline of getting a satisfactory diet. To find diets with an average nutritive value giving a reasonable margin of safety over the bare minimum requirements, we look to families spending between \$120 and \$150 per person for food -- always, of course, at Autumn 1934 prices. (To get the same foods in each group we would have to spend a bit more money now, since prices went up after the period we used in our calculation. These estimates of food expenditures are useful only to show the relative increase in the adequacy of diet as income levels go up.)

"Now we come to the interesting question: How much more would farmers have to supply city consumers if family expenditures for food were stepped up so that the minimum diet which everyone in the country received was at least an adequate one? Of course the new survey will answer that more fully and accurately. Right now we don't know how many families in the country are spending the various amounts of money we've been talking about. But there are some estimates in a report by the Brookings Institution. They were computed for 1929. Using these estimates and applying them in a general way to the 1934 picture, we were able to get a rough picture of the way the total demand for food products from urban families might be increased if families spending small amounts for foods were to have their food money increased.

"For instance take milk and some milk products. If those spending under \$120 a year per person for food were able to spend from \$120 to \$150, there would be just about 33 percent or one-third more demand for these milk foods. As to vegetables: If those now spending less than \$120 per capita per year for food were all over the line into the \$120 to \$150 per year-per person class, the demand for leafy, green, and yellow vegetables would go up 46 percent. If all consumers could be in this class as to their food expenditures farmers would have to supply 42 percent more eggs, and 37 percent more butter, and about 23 percent more lean meat, poultry, and fish."

That's all we have time to quote today of Dr. Hazel K. Stiebeling's statement on how consumers at different levels of income budget their food money.

